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ABSTRACT

A 16-item self-report instrument (included in an appendix) was developed to determine the views held by students (N=1,004) concerning aspects of courses in 5 academic areas: English, foreign languages, mathematics, science, and social studies. Individual items reflected views concerning: understanding course requirments (2 items), teacher/student interactions (5 items), teacher characteristics (4 items), and student evaluation of teachers (2 items) and courses (3 items). Percentages of responses for each item related to these four general areas are presented in the appendix and discussed in the body of the paper. Responses indicated, among others, that science students had the clearest picture of course objectives, were the least aware of class expectations, and believed their teachers were most willing to help them (followed closely by social studies teachers); although mathematics and science courses were considered difficult, most courses in general were not; although teachers were seen as knowledgeable, this was not equated with classroom poise; about half of the students felt welcome in their classes; and about two-thirds believed that tests were fair but not returned soon enough. Suggestions for teachers include emphasizing course objectives and class expectations, becoming a more effective role model, and changing instructional strategies to motivate students. (Author/JN)

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Cocoa High School's Academic Courses as Viewed by their Consumers: a Field Study

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June 9, 1981

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This study was conceived as a means of determining the views held by the students of Cocoa High School concerning courses in the five academic areas: English, foreign language, mathematics, science, and social studies.

The immediate task was to develop an instrument with which to measure in some quantitative way a condition which is in itself, qualitative. This self-report was the result. The instrument may be seen in the appendix. The self-report is divided into three major sections, with the latter two sub-divided further. The student response paper and the analysis report papers are to be found in the appendix.

After developing the report format and getting permission to administer it, selected teachers of English, mathematics, science, and social studies were asked to assist in the project. These teachers were selected as a consequence of my sampling plan. In order to have a semblance of a random selection of students from all phases and grades, I used the master schedule and chose at least one group from each phase level and grade for each subject. The students in the total sample may have overlapped in some of the classes, especially in the English and mathematics classes. There was no efficient way to gather this data.

The teachers were cooperative and returned the reaction sheets to me with only one exception, which was a set of papers which science students should have completed. English teachers asked students to respond to the report in terms of their mathematics classes, while the mathematics teachers asked students to respond about their English classes. Science and social studies teachers reversed roles and selected science teachers

gave the foreign language students in their classes the report sheet for this area.

A total of 1 004 self-report reaction papers were returned, each with 16 items to respond to over a continuum of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

For the purposes of this report to the faculty of Cocoa High School, I shall look at the total responses from each academic area without the breakdown by grade and sex, although these data are available.

Furthermore, I do not believe that it will be productive at this time to take these point by continuum point; therefore, I shall group the SA/A and the D/SD in the analysis of each section. In this brief report, I shall ignore the Undecided responses and simply accept these as that. The data are presented in percentages.

Since there is no baseline with which to compare these percentages, there will be no way to speak about gains or loses; even though my personal judgment of highs and lows will enter into my discussion of this study. This is a descriptive study which may help Cocoa High School teachers to look at their impact on their students. Because I am a part of this faculty and am concerned with this impact, I cannot help judging the data as I see them.

ANALYSIS

UNDERSTANDING COURSE REQUIREMENTS

About two-thirds of CHS students reported that they understood the course objectives for their classes as a result of these being clearly explained. The science students seemed to have the clearest picture of course objectives; the range of percentages was between 59 and 72 per cent. More than seventy per cent of the students reported that they know what is expected of them in their classes; the percentages range between 71 and 77. In this instance, the English students were the most aware of class expeccations, while the science students were least aware.

This apparent high knowledge of class expectations may reflect the reports (rumors) relating to the effective discipline which is maintained at Cocoa High School.

I am encouraged with the picture that this gives.

METHODS

(a) Teacher/Student Interactions

The students at Cocoa High School saw their teachers as willing to help them; the percentages ranged from 67 to 76 per cent. Here again, science students gave the highest report. The percentages for teachers' tolerance of other opinions ranged from 43 to 69 per cent. The highest mark was given to the social studies teachers with science a close second. (This study was not for the purpose of grading teachers, but to ascertain student views. I do not mean to attach any particular value to being highest or lowest in the report.)

Well over half of the CHS students saw the teachers as regarding individuals as persons of worth; the percentages ranged from 57 to 67,

the high being the response of the science students about the science teachers. The ability to talk easily with teachers showed a percentage range between 43 to 65; however, this would average more than fifty per cent. Perhaps, we teachers are not aware of the gulf between us and our students . This ability "to talk easily with the teacher" is one that I see needing cultivation.

Fifty per cent or more of the Cocoa High School students felt welcome in their classes by their own report; the range was 50 to 67 per cent. This distresses me because the classes are for the students who for the most part have no choice in the academic classes and must take what is available; if they are not feeling welcome, something is amiss.

(b) Teacher

Over sixty percent of the students said that the teachers present the material so that all have equal chance of success; the response percentages ranged between 62 and 76. There may be as may as thirty-eight per cent of students in some classes who see their lot as chance-less in terms of their notion of success.

The teachers were seen as having excellent knowledge of the subjects taught as indicated by the percentage range of 66 to 85. However, the students did not quite equate knowledge with classroom poise; here the percentage range was somewhat lower, 62 to 74. Cocoa High School students did not see all teachers enjoying the subjects they taught, which was shown by the range of percentages between 63 and 83; even so, this range seems rather high to me.

EVALUATION

(a) Method of Teacher

Two-thirds and higher of the Cocoa High School students agreed that tests given are a fair assessment of material presented; here the percentages ranged between 66 and 72. However, in the students' eyes, the teachers are somewhat amiss in returning tests, et cetera; 51 to 66 per cent was the range here. I must hasten to say that this is a peculiar phenomenon. I usually return material the following day and, if per chance I do not, many of my students are annoyed; yet, they tell me that here and there papers are out for as much as a month. Students were simply saying that feedback is valuable to them.

(b) Student Evaluation of Course Effect

Cocoa High School students denied that their courses were too hard for them; their denial can be seen in the percentage range between 68 and 83. I am told without being given percentages that this school has the highest failure rate in the Brevard County District. Therefore, there seems to be some kind of problem existing here. For this item relating to course difficulty, the students saw science as the most difficult, about 32 per cent claimed this to be so, with mathematics a close second.

Overall, we are not particularly thought-provoking, so it would seem! The students responded to the item relating to mental stimulation in a percentage range between 52 and 60. For what it is worth, science was seen as the most thought-provoking.

The last item in this section asked students to remember and then compare their present course with others they had had in the same area. On the entire list of items, they gave this item their lowest agreement.

The students agreed that their present classes are excellent in comparison with past similar courses in a percentage range of 34 to 47. Any attempt to rationalize this response will require some more data on this subject. My judgment is that this seems to be too low a response.

SUMMARY

What I see in some places in this study is encouraging and in other places I see a call to commitment.

Understanding Course Requirements

Item 1. We can emphasize the importance of clearly explaining course objectives, so that more than 67 per cent of all students in every class understand these.

Item 9. We may be more effective when all students in all classes understand class expectations instead of approximately the 70 per cent who now do, or at least they said that they do.

Methods

(a) Teacher/Student Interactions

Item 10. Each human being is worthwhile simply on the basis of personhood; therefore, teachers' behaviors should reflect this to a higher degree than we are perceived as doing by the students.

Item 11. Communication is the heart of all prosocial behaviors. This is a place where conscious modelling needs to be practiced. In this area, Cocoa High School teachers are seen as rather "so-so."

Item 12. Since we are here to help students, we must adjust our behaviors so that more than a low of 67 per cent see us as helpers.

Item 13. If we expect tolerant citizens, we teachers need to model more tolerance than our students now see us as doing.

Item 14. Students need to have a feeling of being welcome. This does not cost anything other than active caring- a target spot for active work for improvement.

(b) Teacher

Item 2. Cocoa High School teachers appear skilled in presentation in the students' eyes, yet this does not fit with item 16. The students did not compare their current courses too favorably with those they had had before. Maybe, we need to add a little more substance to our presentations.

Item 5. The teachers are viewed as knowledgeable, but not all of us. Until all are seen this way, perhaps each should make sure that each is continuing to model scholarly behaviors.

Item 6. Again, all of the students did not see us enjoying what we do. This may be too much to ask? "If you can't be with the subject you enjoy, enjoy the subject you are with!"

Item 7. Knowledgeable yes, but we have places where confidence and surety are lacking- a target for work.

Evaluation

Item 3. Course objectives and evaluations are part and parcel of the same thing. I see working on items 3 and 1 as a unit- a place for concerted efforts within departments.

Student Evaluation

Items 4 and 15 Since the course were not seen as too hard and were seen to be stimulating only to about half of the student respondents, perhaps we need to put in some tension for novelty's sake and upset the equilbrium in the cognitive structure. We may need to offend some intuitions.

EPILOGUE

This study does admittedly have faults. If there were a baseline for comparison, then, perhaps, the picture would be clearer. However, this report by these students may reflect optimum conditions for this school. Pooled data do present a general picture rather than individual spots of excellence, or otherwise.

I shall ask for In-Service time in August in which to share this study with those who are interested at this school. Now that there are data to use as a baseline, perhaps, I can challenge my colleagues and trust their professional behavior from that point. If they will accept my challenge, then we can check for improvements next May.

APPENDIX I

FEMALE MALE (CIRCLE)

GRADE 9 10 11 12 (CIRCLE)

DIRECTIONS: Your comments will help us to change and improve the academic courses at COCOA HIGH SCHOOL. Your instructor will give you directions for this task. After hearing these, please read each of the following items carefully. SELECT one of the five choices as your response. CIRCLE YOUR CHOICE.

STRONGLY AGREE = SA AGREE = A UNDECIDED = U DISAGREE = D STRONGLY DISAGREE = SD

1. Course objectives were clearly explained to me.	SA	A	U	D	SD
2. Material presented so that all have equal opportunity for sucess.	SA	A	U	D	SD
3. Tests are a fair assessment of the material presented.	SA	A	U	D	SD
4. Course material has stimulated my thinking.	SA	A	U	D	SD
5. Teacher has excellent knowledge of the subject.	SA	A	U	D	SD
6. Teacher appears to enjoy this subject.	SA	A	U	D	SD
7. Teacher appears sure and confident during class.	SA	A	U	D	SD
8. Written work and/or tests are returned in a reasonable time	SA	A	U	D	SD
9. I know what is expected of me in this course.	SA	A	U	D	SD
10. Each student is regarded as a person of worth.	SA	A	U	D	SD
11. I can easily talk with this teacher.	SA	A	U	D	SD
12. This teacher is willing to help me.	SA	A	U	D	SD
13. This teacher respects different opinions.	SA	A	U	D	SD
14. I always feel welcome in this class.	SA	A	U	D	SD
15. This course is too hard for me.	SA	A	U	D	SD
16. Compared to other classes I have had in this kind of course, this one is excellent.	SA	A	U	D	SD

SAMPLE ANALYSIS SHEET

FEMALE MALE GRADE 9 10 11 12 ENGLISH ENGLISH MATH SCIENCE
SOCIAL STUDIES
NUMBER OF CASES _____

RESPONSES GIVEN IN PERCENTAGES.

UNDERSTANDING OF COURSE REQUIREMENTS	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. Course objectives were clearly explained to me.					
9. I know what is expected of me in this course.					
METHODS					
(a) Teacher/Student Interactions					
10. Each student is regarded as a person of worth.					
11. I can easily talk with this teacher.					
12. The teacher is willing to help me.					
13. This teacher respects different opinions.					
14. I always feel welcome in this class.					
(b) Teacher					
2. Material presented so that all have equal chance for success.					
5. Teacher has excellent knowledge of the subject.					
6. Teacher appears to enjoy this subject.					
7. Teacher appears sure and confident during class.					

EVALUATION	SA	A	U	D	SD
(a) Method of Teacher					
3. Tests are a fair assessment of material presented.					
8. Written work and/or tests are returned in a reasonable time.					
(b) Student Evaluation of Course Effect					
4. Course material has stimulated my thinking.					
15. This course is too hard for me.					
16. Compared to the other classes I have had in this kind of course, this one is excellent.					

APPENDIX II

EXPLANATION of DATA CHARTS

The following data charts are a composite of both sexes and grades nine through twelve. The responses for each choice are given in total percentages.

SA = Strongly Agree

A = Agree

U = Undecided

D = Disagree

SD = Strongly Disagree

UNDERSTANDING of COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Course objectives were clearly explained to me.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
English Number of Cases 246	17.5	47.6	15.0	15.4	4.5
Foreign Lnaguage Number of Cases 90	20.0	46.7	14.4	11.1	7.8
Mathematics Number of Cases 238	11.9	53.6	17.0	10.2	7.2
Science Number of Cases 165	18.2	53.3	13.3	11.5	3.6
Social Studies Number of Cases 265	13.7	45.2	16.0	19.8	5.3

9. I know what is expected of me in this course.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
English Number of Cases 246	24.8	52.4	13.4	6.9	2.4
Foreign Language Number of Cases 90	18.9	53.3	16.7	7.8	3.3
Mathematics Number of Cases 238	19.4	53.2	13.1	9.7	4.6
Science Number of Cases 165	18.3	53.0	20.1	7.3	1.2
Social Studies Number of Cases 265	23.0	49.8	16.2	8.3	2.6

METHODS

(a) Teacher/Student Interactions

10. Each student is regarded as a person of worth.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
English Number of Cases 246	16.1	42.6	19.4	16.9	5.0
Foreign Language Number of Cases 90	14.4	48.9	22.2	7.8	6.7
Mathematics Number of Cases 238	11.7	49.8	19.9	12.6	6.1
Science Number of Cases 165	25.0	42.1	19.5	8.5	4.9
Social Studies Number of Cases 265	20.0	37.0	23.8	14.0	5.3

11. I can easily talk with this teacher.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
English Number of Cases 246	21.8	32.5	19.8	14.4	11.5
Foreign Language Number of Cases 90	8.9	33.3	22.2	22.2	13.3
Mathematics Number of Cases 238	21.9	36.7	19.0	13.1	9.3
Science Number of Cases 165	30.5	34.1	18.9	6.1	10.4
Social Studies Number of Cases 265	21.1	42.4	13.6	12.9	9.8

METHODS

(a) Teacher/Student Interactions

12. This teacher is willing to help me.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
English Number of Cases 246	26.5	40.4	18.4	9.8	4.9
Foreign Language Number of Cases 90	19.5	50.6	16.1	8.0	5.7
Mathematics Number of Cases 238	27.2	46.7	13.4	9.1	3.9
Science Number of Cases 165	35.8	40.6	12.1	7.3	4.2
Social Studies Number of Cases 265	30.6	41.5	16.2	6.8	4.9

13. This teacher respects different opinions.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
English Number of Cases 246	20.8	38.1	21.2	12.7	7.2
Foreign Language Number of Cases 90	11.1	32.2	37.8	12.2	6.7
Mathematics Number of Cases 238	16.2	48.5	19.7	9.6	6.1
Science Number of Cases 165	26.7	41.2	18.8	5.5	7.9
Social Studies Number of Cases 265	27.8	40.7	17.1	8.0	6.5

METHODS

(a) Teacher/Student Interactions

14. I always feel welcome in this class.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
English Number of Cases 246	19.9	38.1	16.5	12.3	9.7
Foreign Language Number of Cases 90	11.1	38.9	24.4	17.8	7.8
Mathematics Number of Cases 238	18.6	43.0	21.3	12.2	5.0
Science Number of Cases 165	29.3	38.4	17.1	9.1	6.1
Social Studies Number of Cases 265	23.4	40.6	18.8	11.1	6.1

METHODS

(b) Teacher

2. Material is presented so that all have equal chance of success.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
English Number of Cases 246	20.3	52.0	9.8	14.6	3.3
Foreign Language Number of Cases 90	30.0	44.4	14.4	6.7	4.4
Mathematics Number of Cases 238	12.3	53.8	18.6	10.6	4.7
Science Number of Cases 165	27.4	48.8	17.7	3.7	2.4
Social Studies Number of Cases 265	18.2	43.9	19.7	15.9	2.3

METHODS

(b) Teacher

5. Teacher has excellent knowledge of the subject.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
English Number of Cases 246	28.6	38.8	16.7	8.2	7.8
Foreign Language Number of Cases 90	54.4	31.1	10.0	3.3	1.1
Mathematics Number of Cases 238	24.9	41.8	17.7	8.4	7.2
Science Number of Cases 165	42.4	33.3	14.5	3.0	6.7
Social Studies Number of Cases 265	38.6	32.7	17.1	7.2	4.4

6. Teacher appears to enjoy this subject.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
English Number of Cases 246	29.0	39.6	18.8	9.8	2.9
Foreign Language Number of Cases 90	42.2	41.1	10.0	3.3	3.3
Mathematics Number of Cases 238	24.4	38.5	19.2	12.4	5.6
Science Number of Cases 165	45.7	34.1	12.2	6.7	1.2
Social Studies Number of Cases 265	38.5	37.4	16.2	5.7	2.2

METHODS

(b) Teacher

7. Teacher appears sure and confident during class.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
English Number of Cases 246	28.3	40.4	16.7	9.2	5.4
Foreign Language Number of Cases 90	40.0	34.4	15.6	7.8	2.2
Mathematics Number of Cases 238	19.8	44.7	21.9	7.2	6.3
Science Number of Cases 165	34.5	37.6	16.4	7.3	4.2
Social Studies Number of Cases 265	29.0	33.2	18.7	8.8	10.3

EVALUATION

(a) Method of Teacher

3. Tests are a fair assessment of material presented.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
English Number of Cases 246	17.7	53.5	18.1	9.1	1.6
Foreign Language Number of Cases 90	25.6	46.7	14.4	7.8	5.6
Mathematics Number of Cases 238	15.1	56.7	12.6	8.4	7.1
Science Number of Cases 165	20.6	47.9	21.8	3.6	6.1
Social Studies Number of Cases 265	17.1	49.4	14.1	14.4	4.9

EVALUATION

(a) Method of Teacher

8. Written work and/or tests are returned in a reasonable time.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
English Number of Cases 246	19.6	44.9	11.8	14.7	9.0
Foreign Language Number of Cases 90	11.1	40.0	21.1	15.6	12.2
Mathematics Number of Cases 238	19.3	46.2	13.0	13.4	8.0
Science Number of Cases 165	19.5	45.1	14.6	17.1	3.7
Social Studies Number of Cases 265	15.8	38.5	14.3	21.1	10.2

EVALUATION

(b) Student Evaluation of Course Effect

4. Course material has stimulated my thinking.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
English Number of Cases 246	11.8	40.2	26.4	15.0	6.5
Foreign Language Number of Cases 90	13.3	43.3	22.2	14.4	6.7
Mathematics Number of Cases 238	15.8	40.6	26.9	11.5	5.1
Science Number of Cases 165	19.4	40.6	24.2	12.7	3.0
Social Studies Number of Cases 265	16.0	36.9	27.0	13.7	6.5

EVALUATION

(b) Student Evaluation of Course Effect

15. This course is too hard for me.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
English Number of Cases 246	2.5	6.6	10.8	32.8	47.3
Foreign Language Number of Cases 90	1.1	2.2	13.3	50.0	33.3
Mathematics Number of Cases 238	6.0	9.0	12.8	38.0	34.2
Science Number of Cases 165	6.1	6.1	20.2	30.7	36.8
Social Studies Number of Cases 265	2.4	5.6	13.9	38.5	39.7

16. Compared to other classes I have had in this kind of course, this one is excellent.

	SA	A	U	D	SD
English Number of Cases 246	15.9	25.1	25.9	15.9	17.2
Foreign Language Number of Cases 90	9.0	24.7	42.7	10.1	13.5
Mathematics Number of Cases 238	10.5	24.8	33.2	19.3	12.2
Science Number of Cases 165	21.2	25.5	26.7	17.6	9.1
Social Studies Number of Cases 265	17.1	25.1	28.9	14.8	14.1